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CHEAP REPOSITORY.

SUNDAY READING.

THE

WIDOW OF ZAREPHATH.



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CHAP. REPOSITORY

SECOND VOLUME

WIDOW OF A FLEET



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THOSE who delight in reading such proofs of the loving kindness of God as manifest themselves in miracles, will rejoice that the following story, wherein the Divine power and compassion forceably strikes on the feeling heart, is the object of their present Sunday's amusement. The story begins thus: "And when Elijah had prophesied unto Ahab saying, as the Lord God of Israel, with, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew or rain these years but according to my word, he went as the word of the Lord directed him, and dwelt by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan, and the ravens, as the Lord declared he would command them to do, brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening, and he drank of the brook; and it came to pass that

after

after a time, when the brook dried up, because there was no rain in the land, he arose, as the word of the Lord again bade him, and went to Zarephath, a city of Sidon, and dwelt there, for behold, said the Lord, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee."

Though we read thus far with pleased attention and are by no means insensible of the prophet's confidence in the promises of his Creator, yet that a man of God should obtain supernatural support seems alone one of those marvellous acts a man so peculiarly favored as to be the proclaimer of the Almighty will to his creatures, might rest assured would not be left unperformed in the hour of need for his preservation, or that when he came to the gate of the city the widow should be there to meet him. "And he called to her and said, fetch me I pray thee a little water in a vessel to drink:" but what is our surprise to find that the widow woman chosen to sustain the man of God, whilst the famine was sore in the land, instead of being well provided for that purpose was herself in so deplorable a condition, that nothing short of a miracle could have saved her and her son from perishing; for we are further told that he called to her and said, "bring me a morsel of bread in thy hand, and she said, as the Lord thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but a handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse, and behold I am gathering two sticks that I may go and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it and die; and Elijah said unto her fear not, go and do as thou hast said, but make thereof

little

little cake first and bring it to me, and after make
 for thee and for thy son. For thus saith the Lord
 God of Israel, the barrel of meal shall not waste,
 nor the cruse of oil fail, till the Lord sends rain
 upon the earth."

Without delay, or the shadow of doubting the
 word of the Lord thus delivered to her by the
 mouth of the prophet, she went and did as he desir-
 ed, went and gave him a part of the last remaining sus-
 tenance for her and her child. Had her faith been
 less strong, or her confidence in the God of truth
 less great, famine would have impelled her to
 administer to the wants of her son, her only son,
 first, however she might have been able to resist
 the demands of her own equally pressing necessi-
 ties. "And she and her house did eat twenty
 days, and the barrel of meal wasted not, neither
 did the cruse of oil fail according to the word of
 the Lord, as he spake by his prophet."

Here let us pause, and if possible, conceive,
 that we may enjoy the widow's feelings, on dis-
 covering that her son and herself by this marvel-
 lous deed, were preserved from the destruction a-
 round them; her mourning turned into rejoicing,
 her seemingly unavoidable death changed into life,
 and hope, and thankfulness. Amongst the bad
 customs of the world, customs that insult and dis-
 honour the divine goodness, when gratitude
 ought to warm the heart and praises sound forth
 to the high name of the Creator, numbers dare,
 even those who read such instances as are now be-
 fore us with awe and reverence, and wonder and

delight; numbers dare accustom themselves to say, "*miracles have ceased*," although exposed to dangers in every shape and on every side, the dangers of human nature, and the lot of frail mortality, though the hand of the living God has been stretched forth again and again to save them, yet they prophanely cry, *miracles have ceased*; whilst they are become by their daily preservation monuments, on many occasions, of new-wrought miracles for their safety. "In the midst of life, we read it on holy record, we are in death," and some of the learned and pious men who treat on this subject prove to us, that is, by their strong testimony awaken conviction in our breasts, that we are liable to meet death in our cup and at our board, in the air we breathe, and in the sleep we take for our refreshment, for that whatever appears most for our earthly good, or happiness, is capable of being changed into an instrument of death by the voice of Him who can kill and make alive, can save and can destroy at will. It is therefore, we may be assured, merely owing to our weakness, or our wickedness, that we encourage a single thought which seems to tell us the hand of the Lord is shortened.

The Israelites were fed with food from heaven in the wilderness, Elijah by ravens in the desert, and these we feel, we confess to be miracles wrought by God; but should we deem it less marvellous that the earth gives us her annual produce, that the seed provided for us by the giver of all good gifts, when sown is blessed with the hope for encrease, and that all nature works for our support, our sustenance, that the arrow that fleeth by

day transfixeth not our hearts, or the arrow that
 leeth by night leaveth us unharmed, that lighten-
 ing and tempest, that famine and sickness, that
 earthquakes, and the whole catalogue of perils that
 surround us forbear to injure us: for not the chil-
 dren that escaped from the fiery furnace, Daniel's
 protection from the jaws of the lion, nor any other
 the most astonishing circumstance we read of in
 holy writ, is more wonderful, though confounded by
 our ignorance, our pride, or our impiety; with
 the common chances of existence, or deemed the
 result of our own care, our own wisdom, our own
 watchfulness, are alike born of the goodness, per-
 formed by the power, and are the effect of his com-
 passion and kindness towards the sons of men.
 But should it appear to those who have unhappily
 passed years in this state of blindness and ingra-
 titude, that the Scripture miracles were confined to
 the first ages of the world, let them for one single
 week, or day, or minute, with open and enlightened
 eyes behold what happens to themselves, their fa-
 milies, their friends, the whole human race, and
 they will renounce their opinion: for when we say
 if it had not been for this or for that, we should
 have fallen down a precipice, or been crushed
 to death by a carriage, or struck dead by light-
 ning, &c. What do we say, but that the agent
 of heaven we call providence, which we read
 never slumbers or sleeps, has stood between us in
 the dread moment of peril, and turned the shaft
 of the destroyer another way. By the preservations
 and deliverances we continually experience, we
 must be convinced, that the chain of divine mi-
 racles extends from the greatest to the least, through
 time,

time, and through eternity; and that we are the objects and subjects of those blessed miracles from one generation to another, and ought as such to cry out with David; "Oh! that men would therefore praise the Lord for his goodness, and declare the wonders that he does for the children of men." We will now return to the Prophet. "And it came to pass after these things, that the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, fell sick, and his sickness was so sore that there was no breath left in him." It might very naturally be expected, that the woman, whose heart proved so obedient to the word of the Lord, as delivered by the Prophet, when the support of her life was required at her hands, and by her trust in the reward of well-doing, had raised herself above the ordinary standard of humanity, would have bowed her head in silent resignation to a stroke, however severe, that both her reason and her piety must tell her awaited all mankind, but no; relieved from those sufferings that led down from famine to the grave, she lost sight of her duty, and instead of considering the Supreme Disposer of events as the wise author of this disguised blessing, for death to the good is the blessing, not the calamity of our nature, in the violence of her grief, became so unjust, as even to cry out on the Prophet, "What have I to do with thee, O man of God, art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance and to slay my son?" The man of God was not, however, offended, he too well knew the infirmity of his fellow-beings to feel that as an offence, which was merely the transport of wretchedness, of despair. Not one look

not one word, not one action did he, therefore,
 permit to aggravate her agony by reproach, or
 wound her spirit by recalling her to a sense of the
 unfitness of her conduct; but in humble imitation
 of the God whose name he professed to revere, he
 sought for her, he pitied, he soothed her sorrow:
 and he said unto her, give me thy son, and he
 took him out of her bosom," (her agitated, her
 rent, her desponding bosom) "and carried him
 up into a loft, where he abode and laid him on
 his bed." Can we picture to ourselves a more in-
 teresting, a more touching scene? The fond mo-
 ther pressing her actually departed child in her
 arms, and the holy man sorrowing from the view of
 her sorrow, gently, tenderly entreating her to give
 the child to him. Nor can we doubt, from her im-
 mediate compliance with this request, that hope
 sprang up from his words in her breast, though she
 scarcely knew its foundation; for "the child's
 sickness had been so sore, his breath had left
 him." Thus separated from his mother's bosom,
 we trace him no less kindly than anxiously, con-
 veyed to the Prophet's chamber and laid down
 on his bed, with what distressful emotions his own
 words will best inform us. "And he cried unto
 the Lord, and said, Oh! Lord my God, hast thou
 also brought evil upon the widow with whom I so-
 mourn by slaying her son?" Our words on some oc-
 casions are not what our hearts, but what our pas-
 sions dictate; the Prophet was grieved that the
 widow's last consolation was torn from her, he was
 grieved to be a witness of the woe he had not been
 permitted to foresee in its approach, that his prayers
 might

might have been uplifted to avert it, and to hold both the mother and son; which the distinguished favour of God had made him the instrument of saving from the ravages of famine, thus destroyed. Oh! my Lord and my God, cried he, hast thou stricken the widowed wretch so late the object of thy marvellous care? the widow with whom thou appointedst me to sojourn, by this sudden cutting off her son? "And he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried unto the Lord and said, "Oh! Lord my God, I pray thee let the child's spirit return unto him again." For it bitterly bitted his anguish to feel that the honor of the Lord's holy name would be impeached, by thus suffering what would appear evil in the sight of the land, to fall upon the widow and her son, after the saving miracle all eyes had beheld. "And the Lord heard the voice of Elijah, and the soul of the child returned unto him again." What a glorious mark of Divine indulgence! what a bright manifestation of the love of God toward his faithful servant the Prophet! "And Elijah took the child, and brought him down out of the chamber into the house, and delivered him to his mother, and Elijah said, see thy son living." See, said the grateful heart, what great things my Lord and my God has done for thee! The Creator has healed the wounds of his creature, and proved himself to be the God of mercy, the God of compassion, the God that can be entreated by those who put the sincere and unfeigned trust in him; and the woman said to Elijah, now by this do I know that thou art the man of God, and that the word of the Lord

thy mouth is truth: Thus did joy produce on
 her heart the same effect that grief had done;
 the present was the sole proof it acknowledged,
 though no less than a miracle had been performed
 to produce a lasting impression of the power and
 goodness of the living God; but let us not
 mistake the cause of this infirmity, this seeming
 inconsistency, impiety, and ingratitude, for do we
 not read from an inspired pen, that "of ourselves
 we are not able to think a good thought;" had
 this Widow been sufficiently collected to regulate
 her feelings, and to guide her words aright, she
 would have said to Elijah, "Now do I know thee to
 be a man of God, for now am I enabled to see
 thee as thou art; the cloud of sorrow is dispelled
 by the assistance of him thou serveest, for without
 his Almighty aid, his Almighty support, what am
 I but dust and ashes, the daughter of error, of
 offence, and of calamity."

For the honor of human nature, did we who
 behold these things entertain just opinions, we
 should give each other credit for meaning every
 thing we cannot stop to express, when the stor-
 my torrent of grief pours into our breast, and
 overwhelms every other remembrance. Of this,
 however, we may rest assured; that the slightest
 inclination to good in our souls is accepted by
 him who weighs all its movements in a balance
 that never, but from our own faults, is found
 wanting.

Our good-nature is not always so active as it
 ought

ought to be, nor our justice so alive to the occasion as to hold us down to that golden rule of "doing as we would wish to be done by." The rule of all others to gain us the approbation of both God and man.

How many truly excellent, and truly sublime lessons does this story of the widow and Elijah hold out to us! How many of the glorious attributes of God are displayed in it, in all the majesty and all the magnificence of the Creator, and the Sustainer of the universe; at whose word famine over-spread the land; the gentle dew, the fostering shower withheld; Nature departed from her accustomed laws at the God of Nature's bidding; the victims of famine, the humble, the hopeless, the helpless find shelter beneath his wing, and the lifeless corse is re-animated by his fiat. How poor how unworthy of his greatness are the highest conceptions we are able to form of him, who rideth upon the winds, who speaketh and it is done, who commandeth and the angels fly to execute his will. Let us then evermore approach him with gladness, and enter his courts with praise, be thankful unto him, and speak good of his name, for the Lord is gracious, his truth endureth from generation to generation.

When we observe, in the words of the Psalmist, How high the heavens are from the earth, and in consequence thereof feel our nothingness in the scale of Beings, it is wonderful we can cease to adore Him, to whom we are indebted not only for

the blessings of this life, but for every glorious promise of bliss in the life to come; that we can cease to rely upon his wisdom, his bounty, his benevolence, when we read he is the father of the fatherless, and the friend of the widow; that heaven is his throne, and earth his foot-stool, that he knows our up-getting and our down-lying, and understandeth all our ways; did this conviction once strike us with the force it ought, what a happy reformation would it infallibly produce! for the dwelling of the Lord of purity ought to be pure, and in order to retain his holy spirit in our hearts, they should be purged from every species of foulness and corruption.

We feel and are dismayed at our own inability to effect this great work; but the performance of it is not asked of us; we are only required to seek, and are assured we shall find his strength supplying our weakness, and his aid rendering us able to surmount all difficulties, for his words of invitation and encouragement are, seek and ye shall find; whence our not seeking lays the corner stone of our own condemnation. Let us then make it our care to shew forth his praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives, by walking before him in holiness and righteousness, to the glory of his name and the good of our own souls.

To prove that we have this due impress of what we ought to be, our words and actions ought invariably to testify for us, that we believe in him, fear him, and love him with all our hearts, and with

with all our minds, and accordingly guard our lips and guide our steps aright, for habits of negligence in these particulars, are such disgraceful contradictions of what we profess, as not only to impeach our truth, but to prove a stumbling block to others who are thoughtless, and unmindful of ourselves.

Amongst the number of these blameable habits none is greater than the irreverently calling on the name of God on trivial or unsuitable occasions. Denying as we have already proved, by the repetition of a prophane sentence, the present existence of miracles; by the idle, though blasphemous saying, "We can trust God by land, but not by water," when there is not any place, the inspired Psalmist affirms, that can hide us from the thunder-bolt of his wrath, or indignation, if pointed against us; or, that should we climb up to heaven we should find him there," or go down to the depths of the sea he would be there also; or that should we take the wings of the morning and flee to the uttermost parts of the earth, even there would his hand lead us, and his right hand cover us.

This eternal presence of the Lord must be a alarming consideration to those, whose hearts and lives are such as they labour with all their power to conceal from the view of their fellow creatures in order to protect themselves from contempt and censure. Our fellow creatures, we can, and often do deceive, but equally vain and impious is the expectation

expectation of excluding the Maker of our Souls
 from an acquaintance therewith. Reason and con-
 science alike exert themselves in the cause of
 morality and religion; there is every probability,
 that what reason disapproves, conscience will re-
 probate, even before the dread hour arrives, when,
 like the miserable mole, we shall blunder into light
 with all our dirt upon our heads. The inefficacy
 of preaching has, however, been often demonstrat-
 ed in all ages; for as after having beheld ourselves
 in a glass, we go away and forget what manner of
 countenance we bear, so when we hear the voice
 of the preacher no longer, his warning too often
 fails to vibrate on our feelings. Absurd and un-
 countable beings that we are! Will nothing but
 the last trumpet awaken us into a sense of our
 danger! will nothing but the last judgment con-
 vince us we are in the road to be undone; more-
 over, to conclude, it is an act of impious phrenzy
 to forget the Almighty, when should he be provok-
 ed but for a single moment to forget us, we must
 unavoidably perish; for in him we live, and move,
 and have our being, and to his bounty alone are
 we indebted for all the good things we enjoy.

T H E E N D.

T H E E N D .